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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that today PM Ehud Olmert will meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; on Tuesday, Olmert will meet with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and President Bush for six hours; and on Wednesday, Olmert will deliver a speech to Congress, meet with the Senate leadership, and later with Jewish leaders. The radio reported that Olmert's advisers Dov Weisglass, Shalom Turgeman, and Yoram Turbowicz will meet with Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams and Assistant Secretary of State David Welch this afternoon to conclude the preparations for Olmert's meeting with the President. Israel Radio reported that it was agreed that Abrams and Welch would come to Israel in two weeks to continue talks of the convergence plan. Israel Radio reported that political sources in Washington told the station that Secretary Rice might visit the region in the fall to examine the influence of political pressure being put on Hamas and the possibility of unilateral steps.

Ha'aretz wrote that during Olmert's visit to Washington this week, by prior agreement, President Bush will express interest in Olmert's "new ideas" but will not offer explicit American support for the plan, and no timetable will be set for its implementation. However, in the main point of its lead story, Ha'aretz quoted a senior US administration official as saying this week that the administration will present "new ideas for advancing the peace process, and that American officials will present these ideas to Olmert during his visit. The official was quoted as saying that among other things, it is necessary to bring "additional countries" into the circle of those supporting the peace process. Ha'aretz further quoted the official as saying that the administration will make it clear to Olmert that America believes the way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is via the Roadmap and direct negotiations with the Palestinian leadership. The official was quoted as saying that at the same time, the administration recognizes that the current Hamas government "is not an address for negotiations," and that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas has not lived up to expectations -- and may therefore not be able to serve as such an address either. Ha'aretz (today) and The Jerusalem Post (Sunday) wrote that the US is also worried about the effects of Olmert's convergence plan on Jordan, and that it plans to make this clear to the PM during his visit. Ha'aretz said that administration officials plan to insist that Olmert present ideas on how to prevent the PA from degenerating into total chaos. Nevertheless, the senior administration official was quoted as saying that Washington is even less enthusiastic about funneling aid to the PA, as the US never used to pay the salaries of PA employees, and that "there is no reason for us to do so now." Maariv quoted senior Israeli officials as saying that during 2006, President Bush will announce his support for the convergence

plan.

Major media (banner in The Jerusalem Post) cited an interview Olmert granted CNN's Wolf Blitzer before his departure for Washington. Olmert was quoted as saying in the interview that Iran is much closer to mastering nuclear technology than previously thought, and that Iran was only a few months away from acquiring the technology needed for building a nuclear bomb. On Sunday, Maariv reported that Olmert's chief message to Bush would be that Iran is accelerating its uranium enrichment process. Israel's Ambassador to the US, Danny Ayalon, was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that Iran's nuclear program was expected to be a major issue on the agenda of Olmert's meeting with President Bush. On Sunday, Yediot reported that Olmert would request that President Bush coordinate steps vis-a-vis Iran with Israel. Leading media reported that -- in Yediot's words, "following the US model" -- Olmert intends to create a "forum of prime ministers" (including former PMs Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, and Binyamin Netanyahu) who would consult one another on the issue of coping with Iran's nuclear race.

Yediot reported that following Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's call to destroy Israel, Israeli diplomats will soon file a suit against him at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, citing conspiracy to carry out crimes against mankind.

Major media reported that on Sunday, FM Tzipi Livni met with Abbas at a World Economic Forum meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Ha'aretz wrote that Livni described the meeting as important and positive, and quoted her as saying that the next step would be a meeting between Abbas and Olmert. However, following Olmert's comments to CNN that although he respects Abbas, he is powerless and unable to conduct negotiations with Israel, Israel Radio quoted Olmert associates as saying that Olmert's remarks constitute a harsh strike in the fight against Hamas. Israel Radio said that an official in Abbas's bureau told the station that an Olmert-Abbas meeting is not on the horizon. The station later quoted Palestinian sources as saying that on Sunday, Egyptian, Israeli, and Palestinian officials decided that there would be a three-way meeting between Olmert, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and Abbas in Sharm el-Sheikh in two weeks. On Sunday, Yediot quoted Vice PM Shimon Peres as saying: "We will not discuss with Abu Mazen renewing negotiations until the PM returns from Washington." Israel Radio quoted Egyptian PM Ahmed Nazif as saying with the London-based Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat that he expects positive developments after Olmert's return from Washington and his expected meeting with Mubarak (according to Yediot, in Sharm el-Sheikh in two weeks), and that Nazif stressed Egyptian and US efforts toward the resumption of the Israel-Palestinian dialogue. Ha'aretz quoted Livni as saying Sunday that the route of the separation fence can be changed during negotiations on a final-status agreement with the Palestinians. Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday, the government approved the transfer of 50 million shekels (around USD 11.2 million) worth of medical supplies to Palestinian medical centers.

Turki al-Faysal, the Saudi Ambassador to the US, was quoted as saying in an interview with Yediot that the Saudi peace initiative is the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that Olmert has named Justice Minister Haim Ramon Chairman of a new interministerial committee that will deal with illegal outposts. Ha'aretz reported that over the past few weeks, the IDF authorized the expansion of the municipal boundaries of four settlements -- Givat Zeev, north of Jerusalem; Oranit, on the Green Line in the northern West Bank; Maskiot, in the northern Jordan Valley; and Betar Illit, southwest of Jerusalem. The newspaper wrote that the expansion of Betar Illit is meant to create contiguity between Jerusalem and the Green Line. The Jerusalem Post also reported on the issue.

Over the weekend, all media reported that missiles fired by IAF planes slammed into a jeep in Gaza City Saturday evening, killing Muhammad Dadouh, considered Islamic Jihad's most senior military commander in the Gaza Strip. Three members of his family were also killed in the strike. All media reported that four Qassam rockets were fired Sunday from the Gaza Strip into Israel, causing no injuries but some damage, as one slammed into an empty classroom in Sderot. Leading media reported that the IDF responded with a massive

artillery bombardment against areas thought to have been used to launch the rockets. Two Palestinians were reportedly injured in the retaliatory attack. Ha'aretz cited claims by Palestinians that a 48-year-old woman was killed by IDF fire at the Balata refugee camp in Nablus on Sunday. Ha'aretz cited an IDF denial.

On Sunday, all media reported on an assassination attempt on Gen. Tareq Abu Rajab, chief of the PA intelligence service in the Gaza Strip. Abu Rajab's nephew Ala Abu Hasira was killed in the blast. The media cited assessments that Hamas was behind the operation. Over the weekend, major media reported that last Tuesday, Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas's spokesman in Gaza attempted to smuggle approximately USD 900,000 into the Gaza Strip in an attempt to evade the economic blockade imposed on the PA since the movement came to power.

Maariv reported that the US has decided not allow Israel to upgrade the Joint Strike Fighter plane (F-35). The newspaper said that this constitutes a problem for the Israeli military and aeronautical industries, as well as for IAF operations.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel will boycott an EU-sponsored conference on "Racism, Xenophobia, and the Media" being held Monday in Vienna because the issue of anti-Semitism is not on the agenda.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday, Iran expert Menashe Amir discredited a report widely cited over the weekend, according to which Iran was preparing to require Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians to wear colored ribbons on their clothing to distinguish them from Muslims. On Sunday, major media cited an Iranian denial of those reports.

Yediot reported that this week, President Bush proclaimed a reform in US immigration policy, which "would allow tens of thousands of Israelis staying illegally in the US to regularize their status."

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday, Shas mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef asked Olmert to request that the US release convicted spy Jonathan Pollard.

Ha'aretz reported that Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev has called on Olmert to grant political asylum in Israel to refugees from the Darfur genocide.

The Jerusalem Post reported that NASDAQ will launch an Israeli stock index within the next few weeks, which will be the first ever foreign index on the market.

Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "In the view of [President George Bush and his aides], the convergence plan is not a fully matured idea; it has many shortcomings and is certainly not a 'lifeline.'"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "George Bush needs a great deal of respect now. On the other hand, Olmert needs to be determined, precise, and credible."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Foreign Minister [Tzipi Livni] was right when she said some two months ago that Abu Mazen had become an irrelevant political figure. The contrived meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh on Sunday did not change that assessment; it only reinforced it."

Mark A. Heller, director of research at Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Israel will have to satisfy American concerns about the political context in which convergence takes place."

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in the editorial of nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "Olmert will not be keeping at least one of the promises to his voters this term: he will not determine Israel's permanent borders."

Block Quotes:

I. "Olmert in the US / First Lesson in Diplomacy"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/22): "In Israel, Olmert presented his plan to withdraw from most of the West Bank and evacuate tens of thousands of settlers as a 'lifeline for Zionism'.... President George Bush and his aides support Israel, and will surely not oppose a withdrawal from the territories and an evacuation of the settlements; but their priorities differ. In their view, the convergence plan is not a fully matured idea; it has many shortcomings and is certainly not a 'lifeline'.... Olmert views Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas as an ineffectual nuisance; the US sees him as the final barrier in the way of complete chaos in the territories, a situation that may spread to Jordan and Egypt.... The conceptual disparity is also evident when it comes to the Iranian issue. The public in Israel is expecting an aerial assault that will wipe out Iran's nuclear facilities and put an end to the apocalyptic threats of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.... A bellicose Israel sounds logical; but the US has different considerations, commitments and timetables. It is now trying out a complex and long-winded diplomatic approach that will most likely lead it to a direct dialogue with Iran. The differences in views will not mar the visit, which both sides want to see succeed. From Olmert's point of view, the visit will be a test of his approach, which relies heavily on interpersonal relations between leaders as the key to a successful foreign policy. For Bush, the meeting will be his first with Ariel Sharon's successor, and a chance to display involvement in external affairs -- and perhaps even capitalize on Jewish support for Republican candidates in the Congressional elections in November."

II. "Initiation Ceremony"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (5/21): "The administration that welcomes Olmert in May 2006 is far from that which welcomed Ariel Sharon in April 2004. The President is the same one, but in the meantime he has become one of the most ridiculous people of the modern era. He is in trouble in Iraq, getting beaten up in Iran, in conflict with Russia and clashing with China. The Americans are stuck with him until January 2009. Olmert is, too, on the assumption that his term lasts until then. The six hours that they spend together on Tuesday will indicate the way things will go. Will there be the famous chemistry that Arik had, that Rabin had, and that Shamir, Bibi and Barak did not? Will a relationship be formed? At the moment, nobody knows. Olmert would do well to let Bush talk and not take over the conversation. To abandon his characteristic arrogance and know-it-all tone for a few hours, and show respect. George Bush needs a great deal of respect now. On the other hand, Olmert needs to be determined, precise, and credible. What they liked about Sharon most of all was his credibility. The feeling that with him, a promise was a promise."

III. "The Great Missed Opportunity"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (5/22): "On Sunday, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni popped over to the World Economic Forum meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh for a few hours, and took the festive opportunity to meet with the president of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen. The meeting, which was also attended by Minister Shimon Peres, had no real political significance: in the months that have passed since the Palestinian parliamentary elections, Abu Mazen's grip on the reins of power has grown perpetually weaker, while Hamas has entrenched itself as the only legitimate authority. Even though Yasser Arafat left behind a regime that grants extensive powers to the elected president, Abu Mazen hesitated to use any of these powers even once. He could have, for example, refused to recognize the Hamas government since its policies contradict his own -- but he chose to recognize it and to give it his blessing. He, Abu Mazen, had the sole power to command the soldiers and police officers in the Palestinian Authority to disarm all the armed organizations and groups that are not directly subordinate to the president's authority -- but he failed to lift a finger to exercise that power. He made do with issuing vague warnings and repeated calls for 'dialogue' and 'national unity,' which was interpreted by Hamas as defeatism and capitulation.... Like Abu Mazen, official Israel also missed the last date for bringing about -- by means of a combination of

pressure and temptations -- the downfall of the Hamas-led government and new Palestinian elections. Now nothing else can be done but to begin to grow accustomed to the reality in which there is no government in Palestine except for the Hamas government. The Foreign Minister was right when she said some two months ago that Abu Mazen had become an irrelevant political figure. The contrived meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh on Sunday did not change that assessment; it only reinforced it."

IV. "Mr. Olmert Goes to Washington"

Mark A. Heller, director of research at Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (5/22): "If Israel hopes to get some political and/or material compensation for its withdrawal, it will have to satisfy conditions that meet American requirements. These include the actual extent of withdrawal and its character: whether along the Gaza model of extracting both civilians and the army, or the northern West Bank model of pulling out settlers only. Most importantly, Israel will have to satisfy American concerns about the political context in which convergence takes place.... The idea of negotiating with Abu Mazen has gained a lot of currency in the weeks just before Olmert's departure, and he will have to adjust to this reality by the time he walks into the White House.... There is no logical contradiction between coordinating with the Americans first about the possibilities of renewed Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and then discussing with them the requirements for convergence if further negotiations are judged to be futile. But moving to stage two would almost certainly necessitate American-Israeli agreement about when and how that judgment is to be made. And that issue seems guaranteed to provoke some serious differences of opinion."

IV. "Olmert Will Not Determine the Permanent Borders"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote in the editorial of nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (5/21): "Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will meet with the President of the US in two days, as the dose of illusions that he tried to foist on the Israeli public melts away. Olmert will not be keeping at least one of the promises to his voters this term: he will not determine Israel's permanent borders.... [Mr. Olmert], why do you need an additional commitment from Bush that he will recognize the separation fence, which was built along the 1967 borders except for tiny deviations of settlement blocs, as Israel's permanent border? After all, he already promised that in his letter to Sharon, did he not? It is good that nobody asked Olmert that question, because then he would have been compelled to blush and admit that it is all deception: Bush made no commitment then, Bush will make no commitment two days from now. It is all a lie. The US will not oppose any Israeli withdrawal, including a unilateral one, because its policy since 1967 is that Israel must withdraw to the Green Line. It will not oppose the withdrawal, but neither will it give in exchange what Olmert hopes to receive. No textual or verbal virtuosity issued by the White House two days from now will succeed in covering up this fact."

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